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ABSTRACT

A survey of Ray Fielding's lists of nearly 3,000 theses and dissertations on film and video produced both in the United States and abroad since 1916 revealed that only 21 of these works included any discussion of the history and theory of corporate or sponsored films. Any viable historical or theoretical methodology for film research should be applicable to all films, not just the much-studied Hollywood productions, and corporate films provide a large potential area of research for educational technologists. Some specific research questions might include: (1) How have lines of communication changed within bureaucracies with the advent of new technologies? (2) What is the role of film or video in those lines of communication? (3) What are the uses of these corporate products? and (4) What are their potential effects on users? It is noted that the major source for such materials is the American Archives of the Factual Film at Iowa State University, and nine references are provided. (MES)

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Prospectus for New Directions in Educational Film Research

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"Prospectus for New Directions in Educational Film Research."

My involvement in this panel is intended as a means of indicating how additional film/video materials and how other methodologies might suggest possibilities for further research.

During the past five years I have engaged in attempting to discover why film history and film theory have taken the course they have. That is, my basic premise was related to searching through contemporary books on film history or film theory and noting the rationale for including particular films (especially those from Hollywood) and excluding other films: e.g. educational and corporate.

During this search, I noted that most of the rationale provided in these books revolved around recurring themes. Themes such as 1) "the bigger the better," i.e. indicating that the more money spent on a film, the more the film deserved to be included and discussed (Jacobs, 1967; Mast, 1976; Monaco, 1979; Sklar, 1975); 2) audience attendance -- the larger the audience, the more the film is worth discussing (Ellis, 1979; Jacobs, 1967; Sklar, 1975); 3) the number of films produced by a company, during a particular year, etc. (Ellis, 1979; Jacobs, 1967; Mast, 1976; Monaco, 1979); 4) the potential "effect" of a film or films in general (e.g. Sklar, 1975); 5) auteurism -- i.e. the assumption that to be able to categorize a director's works by identifying the director's style is to insinuate some importance to both the director and the works themselves (Ellis, 1979; Fell, 1979; Sarris, 1968); 6) genre -- the ability to categorize films into various groupings as a measure of the viability of that film type (Solomon, 1976); and 7) the number of bookings a film receives during a particular period suggested as a measure of the value of the film (Monaco, 1979). These are not the only approaches. However, they tend to be those which occur most often.

I am not suggesting that these approaches to writing film history and theory are not important. Rather, that these approaches have been applied almost exclusively to the traditional Hollywood film and the surrounding production circumstance. My assumption has been that to be a viable <u>historical</u> or <u>theoretical</u> methodology, the methodology should be

applicable to all films. Taking that assumption in hand, I began to research a particular category of film -- a category as defined by those producing such films as the sponsored or corporate film.

What I discovered was that the arguments set forth for the Hollywood film, applied quite directly to the corporate product. What I noted was that during many years, and cited as early as 1909 in the trade paper Nickelodeon, the average amount of money spent on a Hollywood film was very close to the average amount spent on comparable corporate products. Additionally, through other early papers and magazines such as Motography, Scientific American, Iron Age, Printers Ink Monthly, Electric World, Advertising and Selling, and (most importantly) Business Screen, I noted that these corporate films drew audiences of a size similar to the Hollywood film audience, that there were a prodigious number of these films being made each year, that there had been thorough and substantive audience effects studies performed on many of these films, that there was a track record of producing these films by particular filmmakers -- often filmmakers who were to later become important in the Hollywood scene started in corporate film production -- and that the corporate filmmakers also developed particular categories for classifying their films.

My tentative conclusions revolved around the position that if one could apply the same rationale to these corporate products as to the well touted Hollywood products, and if the rationale held-up, why then was did there seem to be so little research being done on these corporate films?

That there is little being done in the realm of analyzing this particular non-Hollywood product is reflected quite strongly in this bibliography I have compiled. I surveyed the theses and dissertations lists published by Ray Fielding -- lists which indicate the inclusion of nearly 3,000 foreign and domestic theses and dissertations on film and video from 1916-present. From those lists I was able to locate merely 21 works which include any discussion of corporate or sponsored films. So, additionally, I did a key word computer search through my university library and located only 16 more articles on the subject.

Quite apparently this is a body of films which stands relatively untapped, ready for investigation by both the scholars and the many graduate students in your ranks. And, if, as Thomas Hope reports in his corporate film/video newsletter, this year alone, there will be produced some 9,000 corporate films and some 36,000 corporate videos, and that production of this volume has been on-going for many, many years, there is an incredible amount of work to be done.

Additionally, I would suggest that there is a need for developing greater synthesis between established theoretical approaches from within your ranks, and the traditional historical and theoretical approaches recently developed in cinema studies. For example, in the first edition of Fielding's collection of theses and dissertations there are listed some 466 titles related in some way to the "Educational and Instructional Film: Research and Application". Of these titles, nearly all read in similar fashion to "The effect on selected science objectives of a sound motion picture with accompanying classroom teaching" and "The comparative effectiveness of a wall model, motion picture films, film strips and the standard slide rule." Of these 466 dissertations, one suggests a syntheses between extant film theory and educational films: to wit: "Critical Methodology and Film Education." These papers presented on the panel today are indeed exceptions to the norm.

It is not my intent to insinuate that the traditional approaches of your discipline are in any way less than viable. What I would suggest is that there is a body of information -- theses and dissertations alone reaching some 3,000 -- which might provide interesting and substantive bases for syntheses of ideas between extant, and now accepted film theory and history, and the traditional approaches and concerns stemming from the many years of developing pedagogical theory.

To date, I have been able to interest few scholars in the merit of studying corporate films or in pursuing a synthesis of pedagogical research and the traditional film theory or historical methodologies. As reflected in my bibliography I have located only 11 scholarly papers on the subject, three of those were presented here today.

What I am suggesting is that, possibly, members of this orgainzation may begin by accessing and discussing this large but relatively untapped body of films and video tapes in the corporate field.

Who better? The corporate product is most often easily categorized in an educational mode. Training films must be structured with pedagogical ends in mind. Those products listed in the Manufacturing or Research and Develcpment categories certainly demand careful pre-post analysis. Even those film/video products in the Sales, Marketing or External Communications areas have as their basic tenets the need to establish careful behavioral objectives before they are produced. Additionally, with the corporate tendency to use interactive video-disc systems (and the number of panels on video-disc at this conference), it would seem profitable to ask questions of the corporate media which are already being asked of similar media as it is used in more purely educational situations.

More importantly is the issue that many of these corporate/sponsored products find their way into our vision -- via fill on cable channels, or as part of regular programming on public access channels. Some are even finding their way to home vcr's. For example, General Dynamics in Dallas notes an expanding video lending library and a present lending rate of company videos at 650 per month. Even in my city of Eau Claire Wisconsin, Northern States Power is establishing a video lending library for its employees -- a library of tapes related directly to the business.

Why are such corporate lending libraries important? Almost weekly now-a-days we hear some concern voiced about what Hollywood films and network television programs are teaching our children. At least we are aware of those products. But what of the thousands of corporate products made each year -- many of which are sent *gratis* to our schools. Do we necessarily want our children being told by General Motors, under the guise of a film which purports to be about a group of young rock musicians, that the profit motive is the all-important dynamic which drives our country? Or what about the people working for Hughes Aircraft, people who may view a company sponsored film during their lunch hour. What is

the possible effect on them as they passively receive information about those political candidates Hughes Aircraft wants elected?

My point is that there are many thousands of film/video products being produced companies and screened both by company employees and school children. Many products about which few people have even begun to ask questions. The Society for Cinema Studies has provided open discussion on these films for two hours only, the University Film/Video Association allotted a full day at a recent annual meeting -- attendance was sparce. Overall, they seem not to care. It is the hollywood product which is the gleam in the eye of those organizations.

I think it is this your organization which is in the position of making the breakthrough in the study of these films. You have the strength of numbers and, more importantly, most of these film/videos fall within the perview of the sorts of questions you can and do regularly ask. Questions reflected in the recent, and I think incisive article by Stephen Kerr (1985). He asks: "What are the roll and status of educational technologists in schools and colleges, corporations, the military, and other work environments" (p. 13)? As an outsider, I would suggest that first and foremost it is to ask questions. But into Kerr's analysis might be placed such concerns as: How have lines of communication changed within bureauacracies with incoming new technologies? What is the roll of film/video in those lines of communication? What are the uses and potential effects on the users of these corporate products?

Where might one begin? Presently the major source for such materials is through the American Archives of the Factual Film at Iowa State University. The facility has been there many years, but few scholars, even scholars on that campus, have taken advantage of accessing the 6-10 thousand films in the collection. Films from businesses, corporations, and educational facilities. Available brochures and catalogs can provide those of you who are interested some information regarding the facility and its function. To obtain copies, you might simply write to: Dr. Stanley Yates, AAFF, University Library, Iowa State University, Ames, IA 50011.

Unlike the other organizations which could

pursue such questions, yours has both the strength of numbers and the history of synthesizing ideas and approaches which could develop some new, intreguing and exciting possibilities for scholarly discovery. I urge you to begin to follow the lead of your colleagues on this panel and to, at least, consider some of the possibilities.

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